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Milwaukee County
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Spotlight on Milwaukee County Workers: County Executive Chris Abele Applauds House of Correction Staff on “Excellent” Inspections

MILWAUKEE – As part of his performance management initiative, Milwaukee County Executive Chris Abele is this week highlighting County employees who are providing excellent service to our community and getting things done, such as the staff at the House of Correction, which in December received two more excellent annual inspections.

State statute mandates that the Chief Judge and other executives within the County annually inspect the House of Correction (HOC). Following a tour of the HOC along with the county executive, district attorney, public defender, members of the Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors, and other criminal justice system partners, Chief Judge Maxine White issued a report commending the “numerous programmatic and institutional efforts underway” at the HOC and praised the “capacity, character, and commitment” of HOC staff.

A specific example that Chief Judge White cited was the HOC staff’s willingness and ability to go beyond the work they do to foster improvements in the lives of inmates at the HOC to assist with other community initiatives that keep us safe. In August 2016 and November 2016, HOC staff provided operational support and coverage for the Milwaukee County Office of Emergency Management staff as they all worked to keep the peace during times of unrest.

The state Department of Correction also issued a report on its annual inspection of the HOC, commending House of Correction Superintendent Mike Hafemann and his staff on the “excellent job being completed with the operation and management of the facility,” the “impressive” climate of the facility, and the HOC’s commitment to clearly and transparently communicate the facility’s rules and regulations to inmates, visitors, staff, and the public.

The state also specifically commended the programming at the HOC, which was not in place prior to County Executive Abele taking over management of the House from the sheriff. The report

states, “The House of Correction continues to offer an excellent array of programming opportunities that are available to the inmate population. The administration continues to place a strong emphasis on the provision of inmate programming. Staff should be commended for the effort undertaken to draw in community partners and volunteers to assist the inmate population.”

“Employees at the House of Correction are changing lives for the better by helping ensure that inmates exit the House with more job and life skills than they had when they entered,” County Executive Chris Abele said. “Like the rest of our Milwaukee County workforce, HOC staff is going above and beyond the call of duty, and that commitment to excellence shows. Where three years ago the House of Correction served NutraLoaf and woke people up with bullhorns, now that Milwaukee County manages the HOC, we’re providing job training and placement, enrolling inmates for health insurance under the Affordable Care Act, and being hailed as a national model for our innovative, progressive programming. I’m incredibly proud of the staff at the House of Correction and look forward to seeing what they can accomplish in the New Year.”

In 2016, the House of Correction launched two significant new programs; Opportunity Knocks and the American Job Center.

The American Job Center, which opened last spring, is a unique reentry training program funded by a grant from the U.S. Department of Labor. The Center is located at the Milwaukee County House of Correction in Franklin and operated by Employ MKE in concert with nearly a dozen community partners.

One thousand inmates will receive services from the full-service Job Center, to include assessment, training, and workforce preparation and support pre- and post-release. This community-based approach allows for individualized programming that will empower participants to gain the skills and training they need to get a good-paying job and reduce their risk of recidivism.

Opportunity Knocks, which launched this fall, is a novel housing model that utilizes home equity created through home renovation to fund reentry services and first-time home ownership. Opportunity Knocks takes tax-foreclosed homes in Milwaukee County suburban municipalities, renovates the homes while providing job training to nonviolent House of Correction (HOC) offenders, provides reentry services to the offenders after the renovation, and sells the house to a first-time homeowner through the County’s new Section 8 Homeownership Program paired with HOME funds for down payment assistance.

These two programs will expand significantly on the House of Correction’s reentry services and job training and placement capability, allowing us to empower more people to live a better life.

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